
Colorectal Cancer Fact Sheet

Most colorectal cancer can be prevented or cured

Screening (or testing) for colorectal cancer can save lives. When colorectal cancer is found at an early stage, it can be cured. A polyp can turn into colorectal cancer. Polyps can be taken out before they grow into cancer.

People who should be screened for colorectal cancer

- Anyone 50 years old and older; or
- Anyone of any age who:
 - has had any of the following: colorectal cancer, an “adenomatous polyp,” inflammatory bowel disease (ulcerative colitis or Crohn’s colitis), or cancer of the ovary or endometrium;
 - has a mother, father, brother, sister, or child with colorectal cancer or an adenomatous polyp; or
 - has a family history of genetic forms of colorectal cancer or polyps.

Screening for colorectal cancer

There are two main ways to be screened (tested) if you have an average risk of colorectal cancer:

- **Colonoscopy**; *or*
- **Fecal occult blood test** once a year, **along with a sigmoidoscopy** once every five years.
- **Colonoscopy** and **sigmoidoscopy** are special tests where a doctor uses a long, flexible tube with a light (scope) to look inside your large intestines (colon). Colonoscopy looks at the whole colon. Sigmoidoscopy looks at the lower third of the colon.
- **Fecal occult blood test (FOBT)** looks for blood in the stool or feces--even when you cannot see the blood. The stool samples are taken at home, with bowel movements on three separate days. The test is then sent to a lab for results. Some medicines and some foods can affect the test results. Blood can be in the stool because of cancer, but also because of other problems. Sometimes the test does *not* show blood even when a person has a cancer. That is why it is not the only test a person needs.

Colorectal cancer in Maryland

There were 2,547 people in Maryland diagnosed with colorectal cancer in 1999 (including cancer of the rectum) and 1,059 people died of colorectal cancer in Maryland that year.

People with colorectal cancer usually do not have symptoms, but sometimes they have:

- blood in the stool;
- a mass or lump in the abdomen;
- cramps or pain in the abdomen; or
- changes in the size of the stool (for example, the stool is thinner) or constipation.

Call your doctor to find out more about being screened or if you have symptoms of colorectal cancer.

Web sites of interest:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: <http://www.cdc.gov/cancer/screenforlife>

Cancer Information Services: <http://cancernet.nci.nih.gov/>

American College of Gastroenterology: <http://www.acg.gi.org/>

American Cancer Society: <http://www.cancer.org>